

Sheep Ridge

CA-010-022

SHEEP RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-022)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 5,102 acres

The Sheep Ridge WSA is located about five miles north of Three Rivers and about 24 miles northeast of Visalia in Tulare County. The WSA includes 5,102 acres of BLM lands (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA borders the western boundary of the Sequoia National Park. Portions of the west and southwest edges border a maintained road along Sheep Creek. Part of the eastern boundary abuts the maintained road along the north fork of the Kaweah River. The remaining boundaries are formed by private lands.

The landscape is dominated by a six and one-half mile rugged, steep ridge trending southeast-northwest, located between Sheep Creek and the north fork of the Kaweah River. Width varies from one to two miles. Dense chaparral covers the drier, south-facing slopes. Scattered oaks and grasses cover the remaining slopes. Some small canyons dissect the flanks of the ridge, and a small creek traverses the unit from west to east, separating Sheep Ridge from Burnt Point Mountain in the northern section of the WSA.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Central California Study Areas and in the Final EIS for the Central California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Three different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all-wilderness, no wilderness, and partial wilderness recommending 96% of the area suitable.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE —
- | | |
|-------|---|
| 0 | acres recommended for wilderness |
| 5,102 | BLM acres recommended for nonwilderness |

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The WSA is recommended nonsuitable. High recreational use at Cherry Falls, expansion of the grazing program, fire management plans, moderate potential for tungsten, and protection of the historic buildings at the Advance Colony site outweigh the area's wilderness values. The WSA does not adjoin any designated wilderness lands of other agencies. In addition, effective management of the area as wilderness would be difficult.

Approximately 600 visitor days per year are concentrated at Cherry Falls on the north fork of the Kaweah River in the southern tip of the WSA. Wilderness designation would close the one-quarter mile vehicle access route heading west from the North Fork Road to a parking area above Cherry Falls. This would cause severe parking problems along the North Fork Road as all visitors to Cherry Falls would then have to park along this narrow road. Serious congestion problems have occurred in the past when the one-quarter mile vehicle route was temporarily closed due to muddy conditions. This is the only route through this area. California Department of Forestry (CDF) fire emergency vehicles require unimpeded access along this route in order to gain passage to private and Federal National Park System (NPS) lands further north.

All or part of three grazing lease allotments comprise the majority of the acreage in the WSA. Season of use varies from year long to March through June. Under the no-wilderness proposal outlined in the Central California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas Final EIS, livestock use, maintained at the existing level of 425 AUMs, would be improved by a 680-acre prescribed burn (to be repeated every ten years) proposed for the middle of the WSA to increase livestock forage by about 68 AUMs. Also, the installation of new water developments requiring the use of motorized vehicle access are planned.

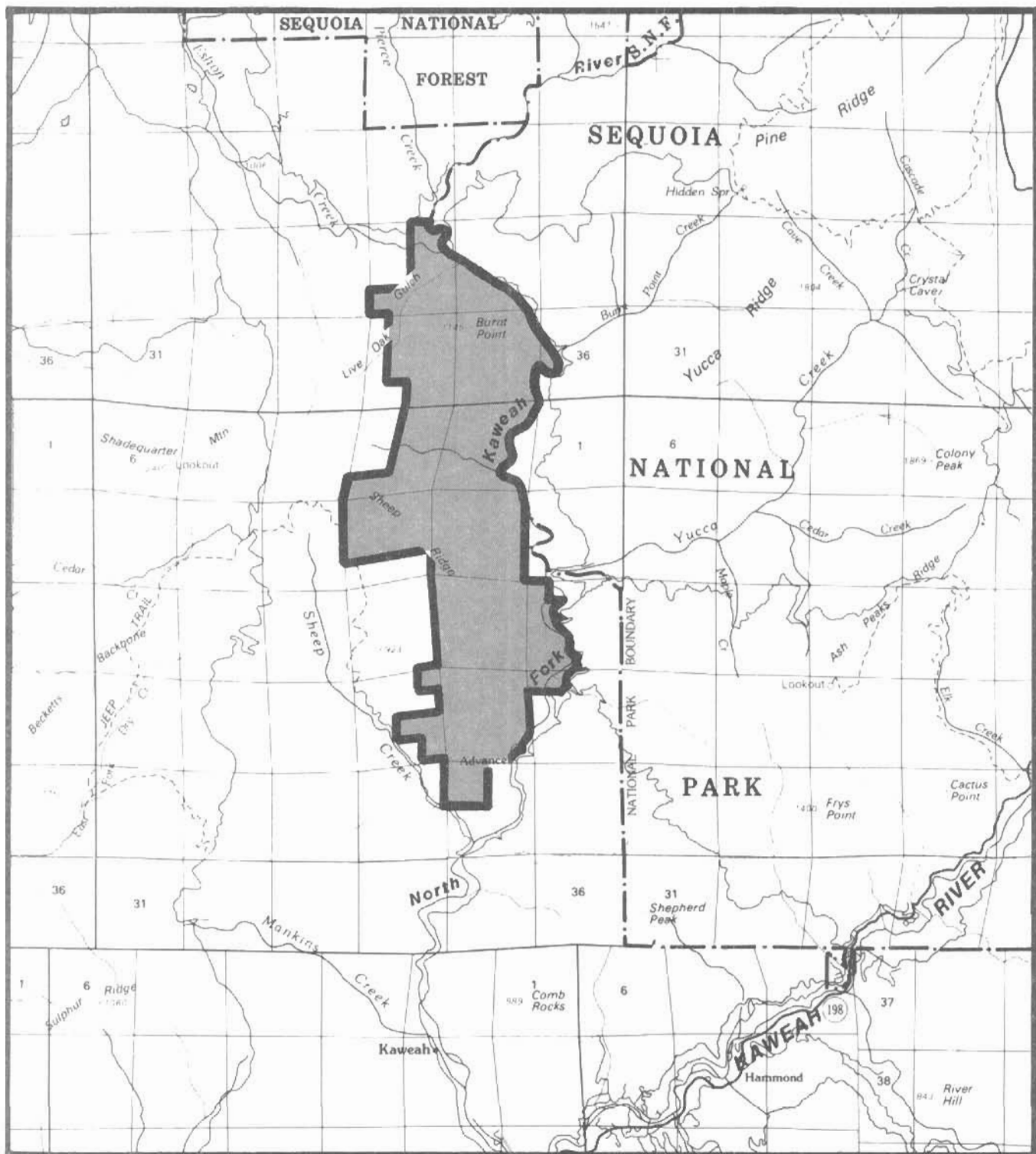
Fire management plans involve the use of mechanized equipment for suppression and presuppression activities under contract to the CDF. There is also a CDF fuel break in the northern end of the WSA that is maintained with the use of chemicals and motorized equipment.

A Level I mineral inventory was conducted of the WSA. Two areas with a moderate potential for tungsten were identified within the boundaries of the WSA.

A fence encloses one of the historic buildings at the Advance Colony site to protect the structure from vandalism and preserve its scenic and historic value for visitor appreciation. This fence, plus an additional one-half mile fence along the WSA boundary near Advance are maintained by motorized vehicle access.

The area's irregular shape, combined with a lack of topographical or cultural features to delineate the boundaries, would make managing the area as wilderness difficult. Extensive signing, and in some cases, fencing of the boundaries would be necessary. The narrowness, size, and steep ridge-like characteristics of the WSA also do not lend themselves to effective wilderness management.

There is approximately one-half mile of vehicle routes which would remain available for vehicular use.




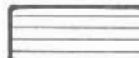

T 15 S
T 16 S

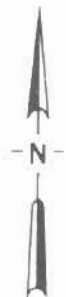
T 16 S
T 17 S

R 27
E

R 28 E R 29 E

- | | | |
|---|------|---|
|  | NONE | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |
|  | | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |
|  | | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |

- | | |
|---|--------------|
|  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | STATE |
|  | PRIVATE |



**Sheep Ridge
Proposal
MAP-1**

0 1 2 3
MILES

010-022
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	5,102
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		5,102
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	5,102
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		5,102

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA has retained a good degree of its natural character. A long, rugged, steep ridge dominates the area. The drier, south-facing slopes support a dense chaparral cover; the remaining slopes are covered with oaks and grasses. Small canyons dissect the flanks of the ridge, and a small creek runs across the middle of the unit west to east.

Imprints of man's activities include: a fuel break in the extreme northern corner of the WSA, a few primitive vehicle routes, the parking area at Cherry Falls, and the fencing and historic structures at the Advance Colony site. The noise and visual disturbance associated with the heavy recreational use at Cherry Falls adversely affects the naturalness of the WSA.

2. Solitude: The area's topographic variation, rugged terrain and vegetative variety combine to create areas of seclusion, particularly along the northeastern edge of the WSA when considered in conjunction with the adjacent NPS lands. Overall, the size and narrow, linear ridgeline character of the WSA make solitude and dispersal of recreational users difficult. Also, in the southern end of the WSA, intensive recreational use at Cherry Falls limits opportunities for solitude.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation exist in the WSA. Dense vegetation allows limited hunting and hiking. Cherry Falls, in the southern end of the WSA along the north fork of the Kaweah River, provides excellent opportunities for picnicking, swimming, fishing and other water-related activities.
4. Special features: The Sheep Ridge WSA contains one of the historic buildings of the Advance Colony site, part of the Kaweah Colony, a socialist utopian society formed in the 1880s. The Bureau has constructed a fence to protect the structure from vandalism and to preserve its scenic and historic value for visitors to the area.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 5,102 acres of the Sierran Forest/California Oakwoods ecosystem. The Sheep Ridge WSA would not increase the diversity of the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sierran Forest/ California Oakwoods	1	41,859	0	0
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ California Oakwoods	1	41,859	0	0

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of 16 major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	<u>NWPS areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,515
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Salinas-Seaside-Monterey	24	3,676,896	45	644,415
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria- Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Santa Cruz	27	3,765,512	32	407,890
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Vallejo-Napa-Fairfield	44	4,832,667	74	2,100,862
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of one BLM WSA recommended for wilderness designation, Sacatar Meadows (CA-010-027). The land in the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, just southeast of the parcel, is managed as wilderness. Other wilderness areas nearby are the Monarch-Sequoia and Sierra National Forests, Jennie Lakes-Sequoia National Forest, Dinkey Lakes-Sierra National Forest, and the John Muir-Inyo and Sierra National Forests.

C. Manageability

The Sheep Ridge WSA is manageable as wilderness but only with extreme difficulty. Manageability problems include the overall irregular shape with predominantly sectional (rather than topographic or cultural features) boundaries, leading to difficult recognition on the ground. Frequent signing, detailed maps, and intensive patrolling along various segments of the border would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. Recreational use at Cherry Falls and the maintenance of the CDF fuel break by chemicals and motorized equipment will hinder management of the area as wilderness. The narrowness of the WSA, its size, and the likelihood of intrusions from adjacent private lands pose additional management problems. Current management has proven effective in maintaining the area's existing resources.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at the time of the preliminary suitability recommendation: The energy and mineral potential of the Sheep Ridge WSA addressed in the affected environment section of the Central California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas, Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was taken from a 1982 BLM mineral assessment report (R. Waiwood, 1982, Level I Mineral Inventory Report for the Sheep Ridge Wilderness Study Area, BLM WSA File #010-022). The EIS indicates that the Sheep Ridge WSA is underlain predominantly by Mesozoic granitic rocks of the Sierra Nevada batholith. This rock unit is intruded into an older overlying Paleozoic metasedimentary sequence of marble, quartzite, slate and schist. This geologic environment favors the occurrence of hydrothermal vein-type deposits of gold and silver, and contact metamorphic/replacement deposits of barite and tungsten. Tungsten occurrences are known to be associated with granitic/metamorphic contacts two miles west of the WSA. The 1982 BLM report identified two areas with moderate potential for tungsten mineralization in the north-central and south-central parts of the WSA. The EIS contradicted the findings of the 1982 Mineral report and stated that development potential for tungsten for all portions of the WSA was low.

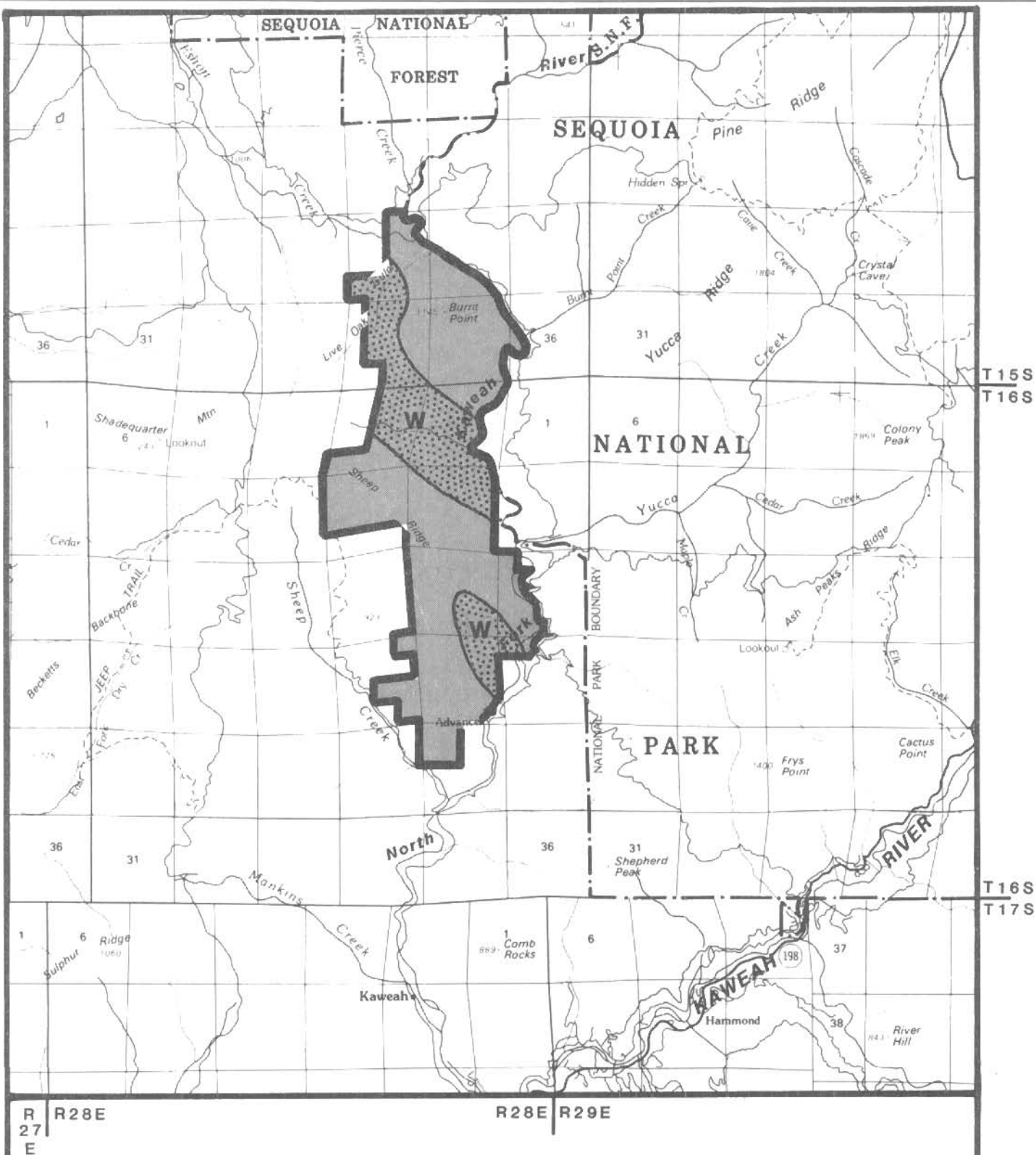
There were no known gold or metallic mineral occurrences within the WSA. The EIS considered the development potential for gold or other metallic minerals to be low. The geologic environment was not considered to be favorable for leasable minerals such as oil and gas or evaporites such as sodium, potassium or phosphate. Any common varieties of sand, stone, gravel, etc. that may exist in the WSA were considered to be too far from local markets and too difficult to access. Salable minerals were given a low development potential. BLM records dated April 8, 1987, identified no unpatented mining claims in the WSA.



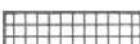

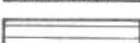

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: Because this WSA was recommended non-suitable by BLM, no U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) or U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) mineral surveys were conducted. As of March 25, 1988, BLM mining claim records revealed no mining claims, mineral leases or mineral material sales contracts/permits within the boundaries of the WSA.

The presence of tungsten skarn occurrences at some granitic/metamorphic contacts within the parts of this WSA indicates moderate potential for the occurrence of tungsten in these areas (see attached map) according to the BLM classification scheme. No new mineral resource information concerning this WSA has been generated as of May 3, 1988.


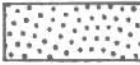
E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Central California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas - Final Environmental Impact Statement.)



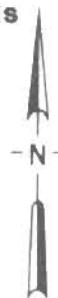
- | | |
|---|---|
|  | NONE Recommended for Wilderness |
|  | Recommended for Non Wilderness |
|  | Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness |
|  | Split Estate |
|  | State |
|  | Private |

Explanation

- | | |
|---|--|
|  | High Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals |
|  | Moderate Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals |
| M | Moderate Mineral Potential Location in a High Mineral Potential Area |
| H | High Mineral Potential Location in a Moderate Mineral Potential Area |

Commodity Symbols

W Tungsten



**Sheep Ridge
Mineral Resource Potential**



**Map-2
010-022**

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values will generally be preserved. However, there will be continuing moderate adverse impacts from vehicular traffic and parking near Cherry Falls (about 1 percent of the WSA). Prescribed burning will affect up to one-fifth of the WSA, but the impact will be temporary. Impacts to wilderness values from other management actions will be minor or negligible.	Wilderness values would be well-preserved. They would be enhanced by the removal of vehicle access at Cherry Falls and would avoid the impacts of prescribed burning.	Impacts on wilderness values would be the same as under the all-wilderness alternative, except that there would be continuing moderate adverse impacts from vehicular traffic and parking near Cherry Falls (about 1 percent of the WSA).
Impacts on Recreational Use	Recreational use will continue at about 600 visitor-days per year, mostly at Cherry Falls.	Recreational use would remain at about 600 visitor-days per year, mostly at Cherry Falls. There would be parking problems on the North Fork Road.	Recreational use impacts would be the same as for the Proposed Action.
Impacts on Livestock Grazing Operations	Livestock forage within the WSA will be increased 68 AUMs (or about 15 percent) to 493 AUMs and its availability to livestock will be improved.	Livestock forage within the WSA would remain at 425 AUMs, but its availability to livestock would be improved.	Impacts on livestock grazing would be the same as for the All-wilderness Alternative.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

During the inventory phase, all comments received supported the Bureau's recommendation that the area should be studied for wilderness when considered with the adjacent National Park Service lands.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held in Fresno, California. During the public hearing and comment period, a total of 74 comments both oral and written were received relative to the total study effort. Five comments specific to this WSA were responded to in the final EIS. The majority of the comments supported the all-wilderness alternative.

The NPS commented that the area should be considered for wilderness when considered with the adjacent park service lands. (Adjoining park service lands are no longer being studied for wilderness.)

No other Federal, State, or County comments specific to this WSA were received.